

## **Some Limburgian developments resisting standardization and regiolectization**

*Ronny Keulen (University of Leuven)*

Several studies have shown that the border between the Dutch and Belgian province of Limburg to a certain degree also appears to be a linguistic boundary, especially with regard to the lexical items (e.g. Cajot 1977). Whereas Dutch Limburgian dialects often innovate in the direction of Standard Dutch or its northern varieties, the dialects in Belgian Limburg are more likely to import southern Dutch word types, often of French origin. Dialect change across both sides of the border thus appears to be not equally strong influenced by Standard Dutch. The same seems to hold true for the development towards more regional varieties or so-called regiolects.

Hinskens (1996) illustrated that dialect levelling in the southeast of Dutch Limburg does not always mean abandoning local varieties in favour of Standard Dutch, but also includes taking over dialectal characteristics that cover a larger area. In Belgian Limburg, however, there is not one regional variety that covers a significant larger area than other varieties. It has instead several more smaller scaled area's with their own structural phonological particularities. As a consequence, dialects tend to orient themselves towards neighbouring cities or villages. Due to changing social or economical factors dialects sometimes adopt patterns of other dialects (e.g. Vandekerckhove 2000), but that does not necessarily imply a movement towards a variety that covers a larger area. The opening of the diphthongization of West Germanic *î* from [ei] to [ai] in words with tone accent 1 in Bilzen for instance was imitated by less than five villages, thus moving rather further away from a regional variety covering a larger area and from the original situation (which, by the way, covered a larger area).

Furthermore, some dialects boldly go their own way and maintain an older stage of the development or on the contrary make some innovations of their own. Hoeselt, for instance, did not participate in the above mentioned development of West Germanic *î* in Bilzen or Tongeren (where all words were diphthongized to [ai]) and now is an ile on its own between both cities. The dialect of Hasselt, on the other hand, distinguishes itself from the surrounding villages by the palatalization of certain closed and mid long vowels.

Of particular interest is the dialect of Zutendaal, at the border of the Eastern Limburgian and the Central Limburgian dialects in Belgian Limburg. Historic data show that the dialect has undergone at least three intriguing developments in the past century:

- the (marked) diphthong [œy] developed to [ai];
- the long vowel [o:] rose to [u:], and so created an asymmetry between the long front and back vowels and between the system of long and short vowels;
- lengthened [a:] developed to [ɔ:], Zutendaal being the only eastern or central Limburgian dialect in which West Germanic *a* and West Germanic *â* have merged.

In order to explain each of these changes, it will be argued that only an interplay between internal and external factors can fully account for these developments. Whereas linguistic mechanisms as a pull chain can account for certain chain shifts, extra-linguistic factors can explain the reach of these developments. Additionally, it will become clear that recent or present-day changes do not always shift towards the standard language or regiolects, but that dialects can still go their own way, as they always did.